

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2324

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FOR NEA/ARN DRAPER

EXO. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY, US
SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWRY -- RABBI HECHT'S VISIT

REF: STATE 80748

1. RE RABBI HECHT'S INTENTION TO BRING WITH HIM "RELIGIOUS ARTICLES, PHYLACTERIES, TALMUDIC BOOKS, ETC." IT IS QUITE LIKELY HE WILL ENCOUNTER CUSTOMS DIFFICULTIES IN IMPORTING THESE ITEMS INTO SYRIA.
 2. SMALL QUANTITIES OF SUCH ITEMS DISTRIBUTED IN REGULAR BAGGAGE OF GROUP HAVE BEST CHANCE OF PASSING AIRPORT CUSTOMS WHICH NORMALLY LIMITS CONTROL OF BAGGAGE OF INCOMING TOURISTS TO QUICK CASUAL INSPECTION. DOLS 20,000 WORTH OF SUCH ITEMS, HOWEVER, PACKED IN SEPARATE CARTONS WOULD BE LIKELY TO ATTRACT MORE CAREFUL CUSTOMS SCRUTINY.
 3. DIFFICULT ITEM OF THOSE LISTED WOULD BE TALMUDIC BOOKS, AS BY LAW ALL WRITTEN MATERIAL ENTERING SYRIA MUST PASS CENSORSHIP BEFORE RECEIVING CUSTOMS CLEARANCE. WHAT COULD HAPPEN IS THAT AIRPORT CUSTOMS WOULD SEIZE BOOKS, PREPARE DETAILED WRITTEN RECEIPT WHICH OWNER OR HIS
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 02324 121705Z

SHIPPING AGENT WOULD TAKE TO MINISTRY OF INFORMATION CENSORSHIP DEPARTMENT ALONG WITH ONE COPY OF EACH SEIZED ITEM. IF ITEMS PASS CENSORSHIP, AND I BELIEVE PURELY RELIGIOUS BOOKS WOULD POSE NO PROBLEM, CUSTOMS RECEIPT IS STAMPED AND COUNTERSIGNED BY CENSORSHIP DEPARTMENT AND CUSTOMS RELEASES SEIZED ITEMS. PROCESS COULD TAKE SEVERAL DAYS.

4. IF GOODS ARE SHIPPED AIR FREIGHT, THEY ARE OFFLOADED INTO CUSTOMS WAREHOUSE RATHER THAN PASSENGER TERMINAL AND CAN BE CLAIMED ON PRESENTATION OF AIRWAY BILL. IN OUR EXPERIENCE CONSIDERABLE DELAY IS INVOLVED AND FULL INSPECTION BY CUSTOMS OFFICIALS IS INEFFECTABLE.

5. MY SUGGESTION WOULD BE FOR GROUP TO BRING SMALL QUANTITY OF RELIGIOUS ITEMS WITH THEM IN THEIR BAGGAGE FOR PRESENTATION DURING THEIR VISIT, AND FOR RABBI HECHT TO SEND SEVERAL CARTONS AIR FREIGHT ADDRESSED TO SELIM TOUTAH, PRESIDENT OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, DAMASCUS. HECHT COULD BRING AIRWAY BILL WITH HIM AND MAKE ARRANGEMENTS WITH RELIABLE SHIPPING AGENT HERE TO TAKE CARE OF CLEARANCE FORMALITIES. SPLITTING AIR FREIGHT INTO SEVERAL SHIPMENTS MIGHT ALSO BE DESIRABLE. I WILL CHECK THIS SUGGESTION OUT WITH TOUTAH IN NEXT FEW DAYS TO SEE WHETHER HE AGREES.

6. IT WOULD BE HELPFUL HAVE A BETTER IDEA OF TOTAL QUANTITY OF RELIGIOUS ITEMS GROUP WISHES TO BRING AND TO KNOW NAME OF GROUP'S TRAVEL AGENT AND HOTEL.
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